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Bishop Belo on the massacre

Interviewed in *Tempo* 23 November, Bishop Belo said the following:

Do you know how many died on 12 November?
According to official sources, 13, according to Timorese people, 50, but a member of parliament has said 80. I have only received reports but I don't know the exact number.

Have you been able to speak to any of the wounded?
No. I was only able to go round the wards. It was difficult to recognise the youngsters; their faces were badly smashed up. But I spoke to the youngsters who came to my residence, some 250 of them. They came here for protection. On the same day from 1 till 6 pm, I escorted them home.

Someone has said that after these youngsters came to you house, you phoned the police....
Yes, I rang them at about 11 am. I wanted to start taking them home but I didn't want the police to interfere. At about 5.30 pm, I noticed that I was being following by a motor-cycle and a car, so I took the last group home the next day.

Is there tension between church and government?
Yes. Following the incidents in the church and the cemetery, accusations have been levelled at the church. Of course there are tensions. We must avoid this; we must try to live side by side.

Some people say Motael Church was used for political activities.
These things happened outside the church. Far away from the church. Father Ricardo (of Motael parish church) celebrated mass because he was asked to do so.

It's being said that the security forces found evidence in Motael Church.
That is not true at all. I have given a statement to the government.

They say there was Fretilin propaganda.
Everything was outside the pastor's home or the church. They found absolutely nothing in the pastor's home. In the church, they only found three people. They didn't find any flags.

Were the security forces breeching the rules when they searched the church?
No. I wanted them to come. I gave them permission to enter.

If the Portuguese mission had come, what do you think would have happened?
It would have been the same as what happenend on 12 November.

What is your comment about the incident?
It was a tragedy. I am trying to study it. This incident reflects the pain being felt by the people here.

What makes the people so unhappy?
Many things. Welfare problems, the stressful feelings and many other things.